

How Do I Write an Introduction and Conclusion?

The Introduction

Since it is a paragraph (see ARC handout on paragraphs), the introduction ought to include a topic sentence. Yet this topic sentence ought to be a more general topic sentence, something that introduces the topic of your PAPER rather than simply the specific paragraph.

Example:

In an example/illustration paper about roommates, a good opening topic sentence might look something like this: "Everyone seems to have a story about the college roommate from hell" or "The roommate one is assigned in college has a lot to say about the kind of collegiate experience one will have." These statements sound almost like thesis statements, but they're too general. Yet both contain a germ of the eventual thesis, while introducing the topic of your paper.

- ✓ The introduction also ought to indicate, either in a subtle way or more directly, the compositional form you will use in your paper. Often the construction of a thesis will imply this information, and this is usually enough. (In a comparison/contrast paper, for instance, the thesis ought to include a comparison: "better than", "more significant", etc.).
- ✓ The introduction must also include a thesis. (See ARC handout on Thesis Statement for more information).

How long should the introduction be?

- ✓ There is no science to the length of an introduction.
- ✓ For long papers, such as theses that many juniors and seniors are required to write, an introduction typically cannot be accomplished in a single paragraph and may continue for 2-3 pages.
- ✓ In a standard college composition of 3-5 pages, however, a single paragraph is usually adequate to the task of introducing the material.
- ✓ Remember that most professors abhor one-sentence paragraphs, so avoid them except for carefully calculated rhetorical effect or unless

specifically instructed to otherwise by your professor (not likely, yet not impossible).

- ✓ If you find your introduction going onto a second page, you have probably gone too long. There is very little chance that all of what you have written belongs in the introduction. The body of your paper has probably begun without you knowing it.

The Conclusion

You may be familiar with the oversimplified but essentially true dictum that in composition, the introduction is where you state your thesis, the body is where you expound upon your thesis, and the conclusion is where you restate your thesis—but this is an oversimplification. To summarize in a conclusion is not enough. Unless specifically assigned to close your paper with a “summary” rather than a “conclusion,” you ought not end your paper by summarizing what you have already said.

- ✓ Remember that a proper conclusion is not merely a summary. Otherwise it would be called...a *summary*, not a conclusion. The conclusion does indeed require a return to the thesis, but a good conclusion requires more:
- ✓ A conclusion ought to *draw some conclusion about the topic* of the paper.
- ✓ Some professors refer to this as the significance of your paper (every paper ought to have significance beyond the fact that you’ve been assigned a paper and must write it or else face the consequences). Other professors refer to the significance as the answer to the question “So what?” (*Hopefully, you’ll always have an answer to that question beyond the aforementioned necessity of completing an assignment for a grade; See ARC handout on “What is a Thesis?” for more information.*)

Creating a Successful Conclusion for your Paper:

1. Devise a transition from the body to the conclusion that doesn’t abuse the old, tired clichés of composition.
 - ✓ “Finally,” “In conclusion,” “To summarize,” and “In the final analysis” should be last resorts if you have no other way of moving from the body of your paragraph into the conclusion
 - ✓ Conclusive language *sounds* like a conclusion, and often needs no awkward signal word. If you’re truly endeavoring to provide

significance to your paper, you may be providing all the transition you need.

- ✓ The point is, be aware of shifting from one part of the essay to another, and do it smoothly. (See also “Transitions” in the ARC handout on “Paragraphs”).
2. *Return* to the thesis rather than re-stating the thesis. Both you and your reader should now have a greater breadth of knowledge of your topic after experiencing your paper. So reflect greater knowledge in re-packaging your thesis for the final time in the paper.
- ✓ Even a parrot can say the same words over again—Do not repeat or otherwise echo words and phrases. (Do you like to read the same words over and over? Then why make your professor read the same words over and over?)
 - ✓ Don't restate the thesis. Don't even restate your major arguments. Rather, re-package them.
3. Draw a conclusion—take some responsibility for the words you just committed to paper. Reflect some of the thought that went into the paper's making.
- ✓ Whether your professor calls it the “significance” or the “point” or the “meaning” or the “so what” of the paper, provide some framework for a larger discussion of the issues you've addressed.
 - ✓ Some helpful questions to ask when drawing your conclusion include:
 - So what? What wisdom may be derived from your essay?
 - Where do we go from here? Are there any further implications beyond what your topic could explore?
4. Don't introduce new or unrelated ideas in the conclusion in the name of drawing a conclusion or finding a larger significance in your argument.
- ✓ Stay on the topic
 - ✓ Introduce new material to support your argument only within the body of your paper.